

MRYC *Tidings*

SPRING 2011 VOLUME EIGHT ISSUE TWO

View from the bridge

By Philip A. Shreffler, Commodore

After one of the most brutal winters in a long time, it's a delight to see the leaves bursting forth, the temperatures climbing and stiff breezes out on the water. And while many of us are still undertaking the boat maintenance that months of hard Boreal blasts occasion, MRYC steamed ahead at the Commodore's Dinner and declared our own season—*OPEN*.

Through a lot of really hard work by the Social Committee, the Commodore's Dinner was once again a memorable event, especially since we bade a fond and sad farewell to young George Morgan-Busher, who has returned to his home in Malta. George's father Ted in his 100-foot, 1885 yacht *Amazon*, however, will be with us into June, and we hope that *Amazon* will be ready to go and anchor our Club raft-up at East Harbor later this month.

Our calendar of events for this season is a full one with numbers of social events, a packed schedule of cruises of many and varying lengths and kinds in addition

to an extremely important Eastern Connecticut Sailing Association-sanctioned race—the Sails Up 4 Cancer Regatta—on June 26. We hope that a large contingent of MRYC yachts will participate either as racers or in the

“picnic fleet” for this event. (A Notice of Race with all the details may be found on our new website at www.mysticriver yachtclub.com.)



And after that major event and major party in June, there'll be another huge blow-out party on July 15 to celebrate the nuptials of Anne-Marie Foster and Dick Dixon, as a fitting conclusion to their Sail Tale in this issue of *Tidings*.

With such an exciting season coming up, and with our dues now half of what they've been in the past, this is an excellent opportunity to introduce new members to our Club. And we hope that our present members take an active and aggressive role in that worthy enterprise. Onward and upward, my friends.



By Richard Dixon & Anne-Marie Foster

IT'S A VERY LONG STORY so we'll just hit the highlights, starting in 1932 when *Sweet Honey* was built by Charles Morse, Thomaston, Maine, as the second boat of John Alden's #52 Design for "easy handling for a small crew." She's a 32' cutter with a 7' bowsprit, 5' bumkin and a 49' mast: a lot of sail area for an old boat, but capable of single handing. I will skip all her name changes except to say that the previous owner (Michael) discovered that the "first" boat, *Bantam*, had changed her name, so he commandeered it for the then *Bali Hai*. Interestingly, Michael, who lives in Stonington, Maine, found her with her garboards out in 1983 at Mystic Shipyard in Stonington, Conn. Fast forward to December 2009 when I opened *Woodenboat* magazine and saw a small boat for sale ad referencing the Alden Book, p. 378, but no photo or much information. Why I called the Maine phone number is still uncertain, but I told the Mainer (who had traces of a Welch accent) that I was "just tire kicking". The more he described *Bantam* and the work he had done over the past 26 years, including a new interior of tiger and birds eye maple and half dozen or so other "exotic" woods, as well as a new black locust stem and full refastening, the more I became interested in seeing her despite that she had been out of the water for over five years.

There was no sense taking off the winter cover in January in Stonington, Maine, so it was agreed that Michael would not to sell her to anyone else until I looked her over. The first Monday of April, 2010, Anne-Marie and I started off from Sunday River, Maine (the last of the ski season) and headed to Stonington.

It was almost the proverbial "can't get there from here," leaving only a few hours for a cursory survey before darkness fell. Her seams on the port bow (where the sun shown best) were open, and some mice had nested right next to the mast step on the port side. She was an old boat, but not hogged, and certainly not ready for display in a museum. Still, when I emerged from the bilge and "wee" dark engine room (which I became one with over the summer after squeezing into the 18" of clearance to

replace a cockpit beam), I said, "I can't find it." "What?" asked Michael. "I can't find what's wrong." Actually I meant that I could not find a good reason not to buy her. Of course there were many things to take care of in an old wooden boat that has been on the hard for more than five years. Michael, who runs a "boatworks," agreed to "do" the bottom and this added to my confidence. She was *beautiful* despite the fact that I really wanted a gaff-split rig. The cutter rig and the Alden look of an old Gloucester fishing schooner, with her massive knees around the mast partners and solid bulwarks, knight heads and a magnificent windlass, would do just fine. Now it was up to Anne-Marie. Cautiously, she "signed on!"



I will skip all the seven hour drives to Stonington, Maine, nearly every other Friday to work on her weekends

throughout the summer and early fall. Although the plan was to always to leave Mondays after a half day of work, we seldom left before 6 p.m. I think Anne-Marie worked harder than I did, cleaning mildew, removing the brown paint on much of the outside bright work, varnishing rails, and painting the cabin and deck. In addition to the cockpit beam, I put in two additional lower sister frames forward of the mast step and tried to sort out the engine, which actually seemed to have some good life left. They say the old Volvos last forever! Due to a lot of rain and other interruptions, we were not ready to launch until mid September. Although we expected to have her stay in the slings for a while until she made up, she was surprisingly tight. The engine kicked off and we immediately moved her to her dock to let her soak for a few weeks before we put in the mast. That was done just before Columbus Day. She did leak a bit more after the weight of the mast, but I



was hopeful it would stay under control, so we continued with our plans to do a much longer “shake-down” cruise than originally planned. We had a shrinking window to get her the 300 miles south to Mystic if we were to do so this year. Oh, we had not even looked at the sails until we bent them on that Saturday. As Michael promised, they were in excellent condition and they went on with out a hitch (well, actually some of the lashings were hitches....)!

SO, THERE WE WERE, on our maiden voyage aboard *Bantam*, sailing from Stonington, Maine to Stonington, Conn. with provisions for at least four to five days. We set off on Columbus Day, October 13, 2010, at about 12:30 pm, and chose to motor through the Fox Island Thoroughfare rather than taking a more direct route further from shore. A little while after entering Western Penobscot Bay, we hoisted sails and took off with the wind! She lay over under full sail in about a 15 knot breeze. We sailed for about 45 minutes until Richard decided to check our speed. As *Bantam* has no knot meter, he grabbed his new hand held GPS, but the batteries had died. Going below to get new ones, he noticed there was a little water over the floor boards in the cabin. He figured it was just a little strain from heeling over for the first time, that a few new boards were getting wet and they would shortly swell closed.



But when we changed course and let the boat flatten out, the water continued to rise. The bilge was pumping non-stop and Richard was pumping with the mechanical pump until it sucked in some matting from the bilge. He decided it was time to contact the Coast Guard with the dreaded call of “vessel taking on water.” By the time we told them our position and got on our PFDs, I was considering putting my laptop in a plastic bag and in the dinghy, which was high and dry. But since I was steering while Richard bailed, that didn’t happen.

When the USCG arrived about 45 minutes later, the water was about eight inches over the floorboards and the flywheel of the engine had starting acting like a water geyser, so we had to shut it down. The CG brought a gasoline pump suitable for the *Queen Mary*, pumped us out and then led us to port in Rockland, where old friend Neil Parker of

Wendameen fame lives, pumping for about 18 seconds every 10 minutes to stay ahead of the incoming water.

Neil had called the dockmaster who arranged for a space at the public dock - on the shallow end just in case - and a much needed sump pump so the USCG could take their monster back. They met us alongside with half of USCG Station Rockland. It was now about 8:15 p.m. and well after dark. Apparently Neil, seeing that I had not jumped ship at first chance, said to Richard something like, “Take care of her, she’s a keeper.”

After everyone left, we put the floor boards back in - except for the one where the pump was - and cleaned salt water and bilge spew off everything that got wet. RDD lit a fire in the wood stove to take out some of the dampness and I made a spaghetti dinner with salad and freshly baked Pillsbury crescent rolls. Then the *most* exciting thing happened: Richard decided that if I could go through all that and still be smiling *and* cook a great meal, including fresh hot rolls, he’d be a fool not to marry me. So he proposed - well sort of.



He said, “OK I’ll do it!” “Do what, I asked?”

“Marry you.” Now we all know I’ve been waiting for a proposal for years, so when I didn’t respond he said, “I didn’t hear an answer.”

To which I replied, “I haven’t heard a question!”

“OK, will you marry me?” “Yes.”

A final note. The upper seam on the garboard, just next to the mast step - remember the mouse nest? - had failed to close. It was clearly the smoking gun (or more literally, the “Mannekin Pis”) when we hauled her the next day at Knight’s Marine, where she is now just shaking off the winter snows and waiting for a new plank. Actually it is probably not fair to blame the mice. The port garboard was, as best we can tell, 78 years old and had her fair share of cotton stuffed in over the years, flattening the plank edge. The mice may have helped, but we will sail with more confidence with a new plank and another sister frame heel or two just to be sure. We are scheduled to re-launch from Rockland on June 1, 2011 to bring *Bantam* back to Stonington, Conn. to dock about 300 yards north of where Michael first saw her.





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MRYC CALENDAR FOR 2011

May 15 – Prospective Members’ Open House
May 21 – Raft-up Cruise at East Harbor
May 30 – MEMORIAL DAY BBQ
June 10-12 – Overnight Cruise West Harbor w/Dinner
at Pequot House
June 17 – Clubhouse Social
June 26 – SAILS UP 4 CANCER REGATTA
July 2-3 – Masons Island Cruise (Fireworks)
July 15 – SAIL TALES OPEN HOUSE WITH TWO
LIVE BANDS
July 16-17 – Cruise to Niantic Bay Yacht Club
(Fireworks)
July 22 – Clubhouse Social
July 23-31 – MRYC Multiple Ports Summer Cruise
(continues in August)
August 1-6 – MRYC Multiple Ports Summer Cruise
(continued from July)

August 9 – Family Sailing begins on Tuesdays for 4
weeks
August 12 – Clubhouse Social
August 13-14 – Block Island Cruise
August 16 – Family Sailing
August 20 – Flat Hammock Day Cruise and Bonfire
August 23 – Family Sailing
August 26 – Clubhouse Social
August 30 – Family Sailing
September 5 – SENIORS’ REGATTA & LABOR
DAY BBQ
September 9-11 – Shelter Island Wine Cruise
September 23 – Clubhouse Social
October 7-10 – Cruise to Essex Yacht Club &
Hamburg Cove
October 16 – ANNUAL MEETING
October 28 – DECOMMISSIONING SOCIAL

*Note: More events may be added. Check back often.